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Anderson, R. A.

The Irish Agricultural  
Organization Society...

[Nottingham]

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## The Irish Agricultural Organization Society AND ITS WORK.

*Extract from a letter recently issued to the Press.*

THE I.A.O.S., Limited, is in no way a trading concern. A good deal of misconception on this head seems to have arisen from the fact that the society was registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, which compels the use of the word "Limited" as part of its title. This course was adopted as the cheapest and simplest way of obtaining a corporate existence for the I.A.O.S., but it is no more a trading body than the Royal Humane Society is. The accounts of the society have been audited and published year by year, and sufficiently refute the charge. Neither directly nor indirectly does it carry on any business except that of teaching the farmers to apply the principles of modern economic combination to the development of their industry and to improve their business methods, and to impart technical instruction in the various departments of agriculture and rural industries. We have spent nearly £20,000 in this work since the inception of the society. It has been said we have "lost" the money, with the imputation that it is a badly managed business, but the public spirited men who subscribed the funds knew perfectly well the uses to which they would be put; they knew that let the work succeed beyond their wildest hopes, not one penny would be returned to them. It was given as completely for a philanthropic purpose as a subscription to an hospital.

The objects of the society are clearly stated in the following extract from its Rules and Prospectus:—

To improve the condition of the agricultural population of Ireland by teaching the principles and methods of co-operation as applicable to farming and the allied industries, to promote industrial organization for any purposes which may appear to be beneficial, and generally to counsel and advise those engaged in agricultural pursuits. [Rule 2.]

In furtherance of these objects it is proposed to promote and organize societies of farmers on co-operative lines throughout Ireland by sending speakers free of charge who may address meetings locally convened, and otherwise explain what steps are necessary to take. Printed information will also be supplied gratis by the speakers, or on application to the secretary. It shall be the function of this society to counsel and advise these associations as to the best methods of production, and the most advantageous means of disposing of farm produce. [Prospectus.]

I will give some particulars presently of the manner in which these objects have been carried out. Meanwhile, let me point out that these are precisely the objects of similar societies on the Continent, which are found by departments of agriculture to be the most efficient means of bringing them into touch with the farmers whom it is their function to instruct and aid. It has been ascertained by the Recess Committee, of whose recommendations the present Bill is the outcome, that the fundamental principle of modern administration of State aid to agriculture and industry is the use by the State of such voluntary associations of the agricultural and industrial classes of this society. The following extract from the Recess Committee's report, pages 68-9, deals with this point:—

The first lesson which we are to learn from our Continental rivals is the necessity for organization.

It is everywhere on the Continent now recognised as a principle—first, that the action of the people themselves, through industrial combination, is more important than the action of the State; and secondly, that the assistance of the State can only be truly effective when there exists a system of local representative organizations of the industrial classes to co-operate in its administration. All schemes of agricultural and industrial improvement are by implication condemned as likely to do more harm than good. We need not enlarge upon this lesson; it is forced with emphasis throughout the entire series of our foreign reports, and in the memorandum of M. Tisserand. For Ireland this lesson seems to us even more vital than it is for countries longer inured to habits of industrial enterprise. The effects of organization upon character are even of more value than its economic advantages. It engenders self-reliance and mutual confidence among the people, it sharpens their intelligence, systematizes their habits, and opens out to them new conceptions of their own powers and of the resources of self-help. Without organization spreading *pari passu* among the people, State aid is in danger of stepping beyond its proper limits, and may prove distinctly mischievous. A lavish expenditure of public money, which taught the people to lean more than ever upon Government and still further weakened their backbone, which demoralized officials and the public by wastefulness and jobbery, would leave the last state of the country worse than the first. If we are to build up a capable industrial class in a country where such a class does not exist, and to secure that the industrial energies of our people shall have full play, we must adopt the methods which countries far more favourably circumstanced have, after long experience, found to be essential for this purpose.

M. Tisserand, head of the French Ministry of Agriculture, says in his Memorandum to the Recess Committee:—

On every occasion on which it is possible the Ministry of Agriculture appeals to the local societies and associations.

One thousand two hundred agricultural societies in France receive for distribution from the Administration about one million francs a year and several thousands of gold, silver, and bronze medals. By this means the State accomplishes an enormous amount of good with a very little money.

In fact, without this means of obtaining the assistance of voluntary bodies, who contribute much of the work and bear much of the cost themselves, the administration of State help to agriculture and industries would be vastly more expensive.

The Canadian Ministry of Agriculture endeavours itself to do the work of organizing farmers, as this society is doing, and on his visit to Dublin last year, the Hon. Sydney Fisher, Canadian Minister of Agriculture, said of the I.A.O.S., at a public meeting on the 26th of August:—"Nothing would give him, as head of the Government Department dealing with agricultural matters, greater pleasure than to have such an organization to aid in the work." Another high official of the British Empire, Mr. F. A. Nicholson, of the Government of the Madras Presidency, who conducted an exhaustive inquiry into such societies for his Government in every country in Europe, says, in the second volume of his report, page 191:—"Such, then, is the record of the past year's work of the I.A.O.S., and it remains to suggest that a similar society be instituted in the Madras Presidency. The Director of Agriculture, with his powers and duties enlarged by Government, may initiate, but not as a Government institution, a central association for the promotion of agricultural associations, credit unions, etc., its funds, including a Government grant in aid, being used in the manner above indicated."

To give now some brief account of how the society, so far, has promoted its objects:—It has shown the farmers of Ireland how to establish, up to the present date, over 400 societies, with a membership of over 40,000 farmers, which are spread over every county in Ireland. The purposes of these societies are the manufacture of their butter on the best and most scientific principles in creameries; joint purchase of their agricultural requirements, and the sale of their produce; the improvement of their live-stock, including cattle, horses, sheep, swine, and poultry; the acquisition of machinery, such as steam-threshers, potato-sprayers, etc., for the joint use of their members; the improvement of their methods of tillage; the development of early market gardening; the introduction of the Continental system of collecting, grading, and packing eggs for high-class English markets; the establishment of experimental farms under the direction of the Organization Society's expert instructors; the formation of co-operative rural banks on the Raiffeisen principle; the promotion of rural industries, such as lace-making, weaving, crochet, embroidery, and needlework generally, for the employment of women in rural districts when not otherwise engaged.

To forward these aims the society employs a number of expert instructors, and carries out a regular system of technical instruction, in addition to its work of organizing. Once a society is organized the technical instruction begins with the teaching of business methods and the keeping of accounts, and extends through every phase and detail of the industry for which the society is formed. A staff of six skilled accountants, under the direction of a public auditor and chartered accountant, is maintained for the instruction of the societies in the clerical and business side of their work—into which the Irish farmers have never before had an insight. Three agricultural experts are employed for the instruction of the members of societies in the best methods of farming. Two of these were brought from the best barley growing districts in Norfolk, and are at present engaged in conducting a series of experiments in barley growing. Three dairy experts are kept constantly employed inspecting the co-operative creameries, and advising their committees and employees in all the mechanical and technical details of modern scientific butter-making. The expense of two of these is borne by the Education Department, but they were appointed at the instance of this society, and make their reports to it as well as to the Education Commissioners. With this exception the expenses of all other technical instruction is borne solely by the society. An expert egg-packer has been brought by the society from Denmark in order to train the members of the poultry societies in improved methods of selection and packing, and a poultry expert is also employed who instructs as to the best breeds of poultry and their management. These technical instructors are supplied with a magic lantern to illustrate their lectures. A bee-keeping expert is also engaged, and instruction is given in lace-making and various home industries to the societies established for such purposes.

The society publishes a weekly organ—*The Irish Homestead*—large numbers of which are distributed free, and in which these

experts constantly write and answer queries. A most important part of the society's work is the publication of pamphlets and leaflets, over a million of which have been distributed gratis. The pamphlets and leaflets dealing with technical matters which have been issued embrace factory dairying in all its branches, the sampling and testing of milk and cream, pasteurisation, the use of ice in dairying, the breeding of poultry for table purposes, and egg production (two leaflets), barley growing, flax cultivation, the destruction of charlock by spraying, a series of reports, with maps, giving the results of the various experimental plots, and the proper feeding of bacon pigs.

Special Commissioners have been sent by the society to England, France, Denmark, and Sweden, to acquire information and furnish reports for the benefit of Irish farmers on the agricultural industry of these countries.

Besides the experts referred to, the society maintains a staff of eleven organizers, all of whom are men of special attainments and a considerable amount of practical and expert knowledge, of which the members of the societies constantly avail themselves. From the society's office daily there issues a stream of correspondence giving technical and other advice in response to the constant application of the societies. A secretarial and clerical staff consisting of nine persons is necessitated to deal with this ever-increasing and varied correspondence.

May I point out to English readers that the work of our society will prove ultimately of benefit, not to Ireland alone, but also to the whole British Empire. Our advice on technical matters has been sought by English farmers, who were referred to us by the English Board of Agriculture; it has also been sought by English agricultural societies and chambers of agriculture, and by official inquirers from the Isle of Man, Canada, Barbadoes, India, and the United States.

I think I have sufficiently proved that this is not a trading body, nor one that has a political object, but that it is one that is of the greatest public utility.

Let me conclude by reiterating that this society is maintained by voluntary subscription, and that of the moneys already expended on its work three-fourths have been devoted to promoting the technical instruction I have described above.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

R. A. ANDERSON, Secretary I.A.O.S., Dublin.

22nd July, 1899.

The foregoing letter should enable anyone to gain a correct knowledge of the aims of the I.A.O.S. It only remains to be added that a society with similar ends in view has, with the cordial approval of the Rt. Hon. Horace Plunkett, M.P., president, and the committee of the I.A.O.S., been started in this country. The British Agricultural Organization Society has every reason to hope that, given a fair measure of public support, it also will be able to show in the course of the next few years a corresponding success and benefit to the British farmer to that effected amongst the farmers of Ireland by the I.A.O.S. Any further information will be willingly afforded on application to the Secretary, the British Agricultural Organization Society, 24, Castle Gate, Newark-on-Trent.

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